

# Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

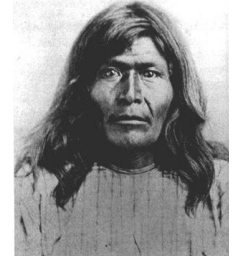


Curriculum Materials Grades 9-12

Student Activity: War in West Texas



## **Grierson's Report on Operations Against Victorio Written from Headquarters, District of the Pecos, Fort Concho, Texas - September 20, 1880 To Assistant Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Department of Texas, San Antonio**



Sir: I have the honor to report that in the latter part of May [1880], soon after my return from the expedition to the Mescalero Agency, New Mexico, Generals Hatch and Pope reported that Victorio's band [100-130 warriors], largely re-enforced by Mescaleros and other Indians, was moving toward the Mescalero Agency, and thus caused troops to be again ordered into New Mexico from this district.

Between May 21 and June 23 numerous telegrams were received, giving rather indefinite or complicated instructions for my guidance....

From what I knew of the hostile Indians and their whereabouts, I felt confident that they would not go to the agency, as indicated, and telegraphed you June 4 to that effect.

I telegraphed you June 24 that it would be more judicious to increase the force in the western part of the district of the Pecos, toward the Rio Grande and the Guadalupe Mountains.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June I was informed, by telegraph from department headquarters, that my views, contained in the telegram of June 24, had been approved by the Lieutenant General and that I could make my arrangements and dispose my troops accordingly.

Under the date of July 13, Colonel Vale, Mexican army, reported for Carrizal, Mexico, that his

command, consisting of four hundred and twenty men, would take the field on the 14<sup>th</sup> against Victorio and his band of hostile Indians, and that a force of one hundred and twenty cavalry was at that time following the trail toward Eagle Springs, Texas...

On the 27<sup>th</sup> I proceeded to [Fort] Quitman; and on the 28<sup>th</sup>, to my surprise, the Mexican troops returned opposite that point entirely out of provisions... As the Mexican troops were thus withdrawn from the front of the Indians, and believing that the latter would at once attempt to cross northward, I left Quitman, on the 29<sup>th</sup> for Eagle Springs, determined to intercept them.

While en route, and near the east end of Quitman Canyon, an Indian was observed on the top of a ridge near the road, who upon being fired at, quickly fled. Soon afterward, I was met by couriers from Captain Gilmore, commanding officer at Eagle Springs, bringing information that the Indians had crossed the [Rio Grande] river, and that the patrols had been twice fired upon by them.

Deeming it my duty, I camped directly in their line of march, and at the only water for a long distance north. I then had with me only first Lieutenant William H. Beck, Tenth cavalry, one non-commissioned officer and five privates—two of whom were teamsters—and my son, Robert G.

Grierson, who just through school, was out in search of adventure and suddenly found it.

About 9 o'clock a.m. the Indians were observed approaching in force, but seeing our strong position



**The battle at Tinaja de las Palmas, July 30, 1880, depicted by diorama in park museum at Fort Davis N.H.S.**

I sent orders, by stages passing during the night, for the cavalry at Eagle Springs and Quitman to proceed immediately to my camp at Tenaja de los Palma [sic]. At 1 a.m., July 30<sup>th</sup>, couriers brought reports that the patrols had again been fired at; one scout killed; and that the main body of Indians were encamped the evening before, south of us only ten miles distant...

On account of the hazardous position I was thought to be in by the officers at Eagle Springs, instead of all the cavalry coming, as ordered, a detachment of fifteen men of Company G, Tenth Cavalry, under Lieutenant Finley reported at 4 o'clock a.m. for the purpose of escorting me to that point. As I had no thought of being escorted there, or anywhere else, I immediately sent two of these men back with peremptory orders that all available cavalry be at once sent to my support. Being well supplied with ammunition, water, and provisions, I was confident of my ability to hold the position until their arrival, or as long as necessary.

they flanked off to the east, endeavoring to cross the road at a safe distance. With a view of preventing them, and to make know their position to Captain Viele, then approaching from Eagle Springs, and believed to be near, I ordered Lieutenant Finley, with ten men of his detachment, to charge and engage the Indians—the object being to unite our whole force against the enemy.

Lieutenant Finley carried out his instructions handsomely, briskly engaged the Indians, and although they were in more favorable positions and vastly superior in numbers, held them in check until the arrival of Captain Viele, about 10 a.m., when unfortunately, the advance of the latter took Finley's party for Indians, and fired upon them, causing them to withdraw to our position, pursued by a large force of the enemy, who when they approached sufficiently near, were again vigorously pursued and driven off in great confusion.

At the same time Captain Viele's command was having a hot fight with the Indians, who were endeavoring to prevent his further advance. Soon Captain Nolan was seen advancing with his

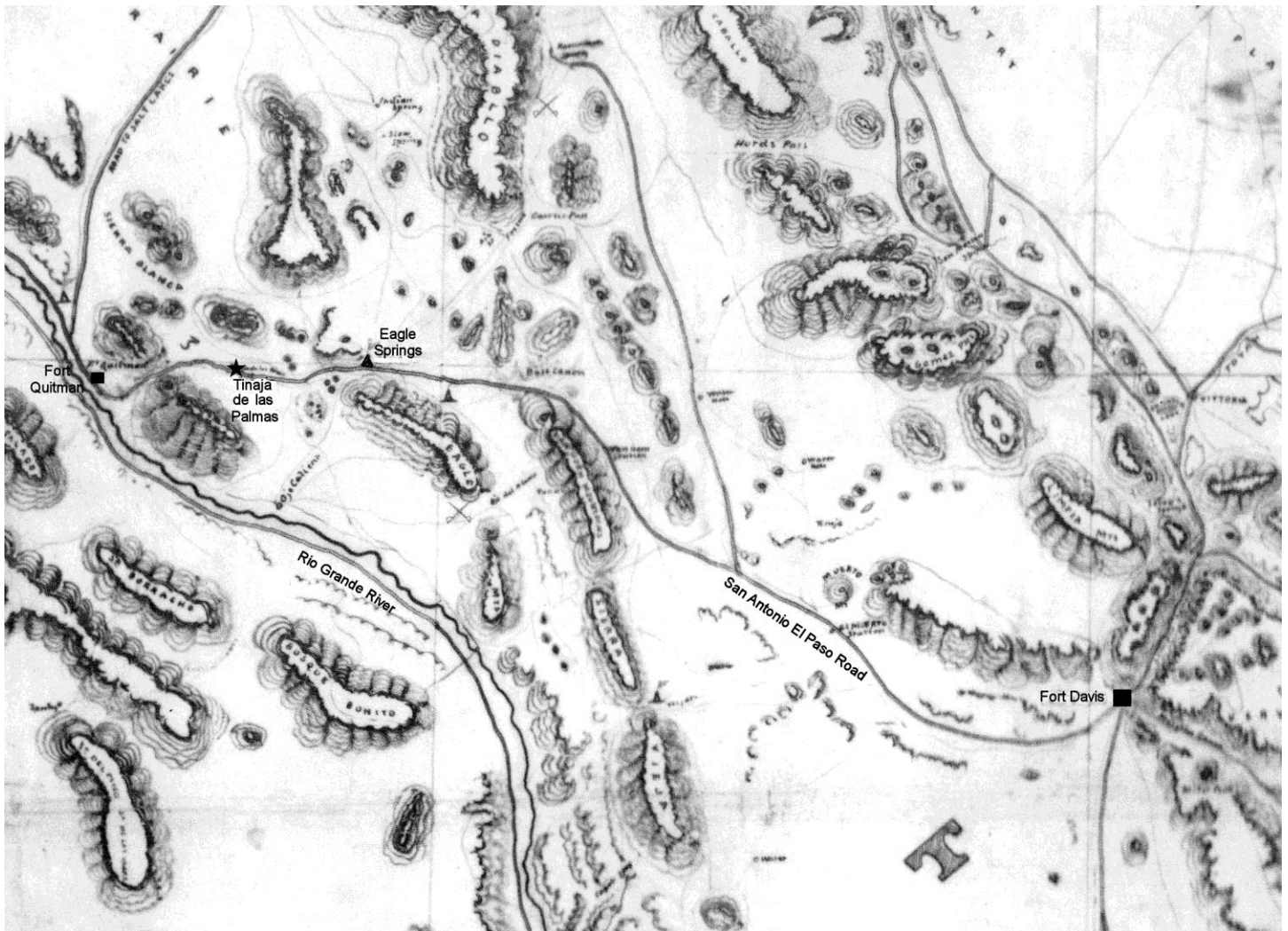
company from the west. A portion of the Indians, observing this, withdrew southward, and Captain Viele, forcing his way through, drove the Indians from a ridge south of our camp and joined us soon after. The Indians then made another attempt to cross north, but were again driven back by the cavalry. Captain Nolan advanced very rapidly for the last six or eight miles, and upon his near approach, the Indians scattered and fled in great haste and confusion toward the Rio Grand, one having succeeded in going north.

We, undoubtedly, fought Victorio's whole effective force, and in entire engagement, which lasted four hours seven Indians were killed and large number wounded. In the fight Lieutenant R. S. Colladay, Tenth cavalry, was wounded and Private Davis, Company C, Tenth Cavalry, killed. Ten horses were killed and three horses and two mules wounded....

The great difficulties to be encountered in operating against Indians in Western Texas, throughout which there is a great scarcity of water, cannot be conceived by anyone unacquainted with the nature and extent of the country. Numerous rugged and precipitous mountain ranges, broken by canons, rise from the plains, while the foothills, bordering the mountains, are cut into deep ravines and gullies....

Without the accurate knowledge of the country, which myself and troops have gained during three years' hard work, scouting and exploring, we could not have been successful. I trust that the services rendered by my command, during the late campaign, will meet with that recognition which earnest effort in the line of duty deserves.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
B[enjamin]. H. Grierson, Colonel,  
Tenth Cavalry, commanding



1880 U.S. Army map of Fort Davis and the area west of it about 150 miles out

Worksheet for:  
*Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson's 1880 Report on Operations Against Victorio*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. What type of source is this? Primary or secondary, explain why.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What types of technology did Colonel Grierson rely on in his report?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the emergency Colonel Grierson is addressing? [Note: Grierson and a small group of his men were encamped by a strategic waterhole named Tinaja De Las Palmas, near present day Sierra Blanca, Texas—88 miles east of El Paso. The approximately 100 Apaches were coming from Mexico and heading to New Mexico where their families & friend lived; they were no doubt heading to the waterhole for water and did not initially expect to encounter soldiers.] Get a modern map and locate Mexico, Fort Davis, Fort Concho, Tinaja De Las Palmas, and the Mescalero Agency in New Mexico.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How did geography play a role in Grierson's fight with Victorio?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Who was Victorio? Why was he heading north toward the Mescalero Agency in New Mexico Territory? Imagine the story from the Apaches' point of view. [Note: Victorio was killed in Mexico by Mexican troops in October 1880.]
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Is this the way you pictured a battle between the Apaches and U.S. Army? Explain.